

K12 School Support Options: 504 Plan vs. Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Federal civil rights laws are designed to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities. Public schools use these laws to ensure students have equal access to education. Developmental or behavioral health issues can affect a child's ability to learn in school.

If your child has been diagnosed with Autism, ADHD, Anxiety, Depression, an Eating Disorder, or a Learning Disorder, you have the right to request a meeting to discuss how your child's school can best support their unique learning needs.

Your pediatric provider can write a letter confirming your child has a qualifying diagnosis. The table below outlines the different levels of support that exist. Private schools do not have to accept a 504 plan or an IEP request but usually are willing to work with families to support students.

	504 Plan	IEP
Law	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Cost	No cost to family	No cost to family
How to Qualify	Requires a written statement by a medical provider confirming your child has a disability that interferes with their ability to learn, read, communicate, or think in a general education classroom.	Requires a full independent evaluation by the school to confirm your child has an educational deficit that requires specialized instruction to make progress. There are 13 eligible categories : 
Benefits to Your Child	Accommodations to support learning in general education class.	Special educational services. Can include extended school year and medically related services.
How Plan is Implemented	504 administrator is assigned by your child's school. Family communicates with 504 administrator +/- teacher(s) as needed to confirm or adjust accommodations.	More formal process in which multiple school and district specialists meet with your family. Written IEP document includes individual learning goals and outlines special education services the school will provide.
Review Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rules vary from state to state ✓ 504 Plans are typically reviewed each school year ✓ Qualifications are reassessed as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Federal law specifies who is involved in creating and reviewing an IEP ✓ Annual review and update ✓ Students are reassessed every 3 years ✓ School must notify parents if changes are made to the IEP and request permission for evaluations



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